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# DR. LANGHORNE'S

# SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE

GENTLEMEN OF SOMERSETSHIRE.

[Price ONE SHILLING.]

*The Love of Mankind, the Fundamental Principle of the Chriſtian Religion;*

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A

# SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE

## GENTLEMEN NATIVES

OF THE

## COUNTY OF SOMERSET,

AT THEIR

ANNUAL MEETING, in the Church of St. Mary Redcliff, Bristol, September 16, 1776.

By JOHN LANGHORNE, D. D.
Rector of Blagdon, Somersetshire.

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MDCCLXXVII.

A

# SERMON.

## ACTS vii. 26. *Sirs! Ye are brethren.*

THERE ſeems to be nothing more adapted to promote the moral affections, than the hiſtory of man. He preſents himſelf, in the firſt ſcene of his exiſtence, as an object of compaſſion; as a Being devoted to peril and labour, to penury and pain!--- "Who told thee that thou waſt naked?" The pathetic queſtion was anſwered by the conſciouſneſs of his infirmities, when he retired from the preſence of his Maker, and hid himſelf in the ſhade.---The peculiarity of his condition verifies his fall from the favour of his God. To "till the ground from whence he was taken" was

by no means the ſevereſt circumſtance in his allotment; for the earth was not an unnatural mother, and though her boſom, like his own, was ſentenced to the produce of thorns, ſhe rewarded with health his labour, and his induſtry with bread. The moſt pitiable part of his condition was that moral ſenſe of pain which diſtinguiſhed him from other creatures, and gave him a cruel ſuperiority in the ſcale of creation. Fear and care, and ſorrow and ſhame, and all the train of their attendant anxieties;---the proſpect of advancing infirmities, and the anticipation of diſtant evil;---the regret of buried friendſhip, and the anguiſh of parted affection;---misfortune that defeats the faireſt aims, and chance that makes a jeſt of ſagacity;---theſe form a part of the mournful catalogue of his rational diſtinctions.---And is it poſſible that a Being ſo circumſtanced ſhould at any time be the object of envy, or enmity, or averſion?---I am entitled to compaſſion, ſaid the philoſopher (and he ſaid wiſely) *becauſe I am a Man.* He thought the infirmities of his Being ſufficient to ſupport his claim, and that, ſuch a plea ſuggeſted, no other could be neceſſary.

Beſide this idea of ſocial compaſſion, there is another leſſon which, I think, we may draw without difficulty from this moral view of our nature.

At the ſame time that we are taught to ſacrifice our diſpleaſure to a ſenſe and ſympathy of our common weakneſs,

weakneſs, we may learn to cheriſh that perſonal humility and acquieſcence which are the ſafeſt pledges of our proper peace.

And though theſe too are no leſs pledges of the peace of ſociety, becauſe the humble have no competitions, and the reſigned are without reſentments, yet is it that fraternal relation we bear to every individual of our ſpecies, which muſt ever plead with us moſt effectually in their behalf.

*Sirs, ye are* BRETHREN, ſaid the Hebrew legiſlator; *why do ye wrong one to another?* He thought THIS a ſufficient foundation for a negative virtue; but a legiſlator of ſuperior character came after him, and reſted upon THIS relation the whole moral law.

His beloved diſciple, who, leaning on his maſter's boſom, knew moſt of his heart, has preſſed this doctrine upon us with all the fervour of inſpiration. *He that hateth his Brother*, ſaith he, *is in darkneſs, and walketh in darkneſs*; and, again, *He that loveth not his Brother, abideth in death.*---Expreſſions theſe of ſtrong emphaſis and import, wherein the Apoſtle implies not only that moral darkneſs of the mind which muſt neceſſarily attend the miſerable ſtate of hatred, but that final, and irremediable death, which excludeth from the love of God him that loveth not his brother.

*He*

*He that hateth his Brother walketh in darkneſs.*---This image is moſt truly and moſt elegantly appropriated: The uncomfortable melancholy, the anxiety and apprehenſion, which muſt attend the ſteps of him who walketh in darkneſs, are ſtrongly expreſſive of that inſulated ſtate of mind, if I may allow myſelf ſo merciful an expreſſion, which is deſtitute of the tender charities of humanity.

But the Apoſtle of Love, (for ſo I muſt call him, whoſe character is ſo lively a tranſcript of his Lord's that he ſeems to have imbibed his own gracious ſpirit) the amiable Apoſtle does not enforce this brotherly affection as a new doctrine.---No; he knew that it had ſubſiſted from the commencement of creation, and that it was THE FIRST PRECEPT IN NATURAL MORALITY. This, ſaith he, is the meſſage that ye heard from the beginning, that we ſhould love one another; and in a ſecond epiſtle he expreſſeth himſelf to the ſame purpoſe, almoſt in the ſame words, not as though I wrote a new commandment, but that which we have from the beginning, that we love one another.

Yet the precept under the Jewiſh diſpenſation was leſs liberal and leſs comprehenſive. It was of a different caſt and complexion. It embraced a nation, a tribe, a PEOPLE; but ſhut the reſt of mankind out of it's circle. Ye ſhall not, ſays the writer of the ſecond law, eat of any

any thing that dieth of itſelf. Thou ſhalt give it unto the ſtranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayeſt ſell it to an alien.

This ſingle paſſage ſhews us as clearly as a thouſand proofs beſides might do, what a contemptuous idea God's peculiar people had of the reſt of his human creatures.

Yet this was not the fault of their religion, nor of the theocracy under which they lived. For, as the legiſlator of Chriſtianity obſerved on another occaſion, it was not ſo from the beginning, but became an effect of the hardneſs of their hearts. Their diſpenſation, though divine, was liable to the corruptions of human depravity. The pride conſequent on the idea of their being a peculiar people, in time generated a national contempt, arreſted the natural courſe of the affections, and threw the maſs of humanity at too great a diſtance.

For this, however, they were terribly repaid, when, afterwards, the Roman power held and treated them in a manner more humiliating even than they had treated others.

To reform this great depravity in the moral order of life, and to reſtore the principle of philanthropy to its original extent and import, was a primary object with the meſſenger of our ſalvation.

For this he left the boſom of his father, the boſom of univerſal benevolence, to teach the world that love was not of a limited nature; that it was not appropriated to ſects or ſocieties, to tribes or nations; that man, indiſcriminately, was it's object, and that it was at once the privilege and the birthright of humanity.

Here the foundation of natural morality and of Chriſtian ethics became one and the ſame principle. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

It was a principle, however, which received it's perfection only from the hands of the Chriſtian legiſlator. To look upon mankind as one great fraternity, was a principle aboliſhed under the Jewiſh diſpenſation, and perhaps unknown to Pagan philoſophy. All of this idea that the latter preſcribed was compaſſion, and the former allowed even this only in a limited degree.---But Jeſus, the ſon of everlaſting love, gave freedom and expanſion to the ſource that had been diverted into narrow channels. He opened all the fountains of human affection, and like the river that went out of Eden and was afterwards parted into ſeveral ſtreams, he diffuſed the natural but confined current of benevolence, and extended the love of human kind to the whole of human race.

Go, ſaid he, teach ye all nations---Teach them the doctrine that I have taught you---Teach them what philoſophy hath

hath not known, and what Judaiſm hath miſapplied---Teach them that to love their fellow-creatures is to fulfil the law of their Creator---Teach them that it is the pleaſure of the eternal providence, that ſuch of his created beings as are liable to the moſt ſenſible ſufferings ſhould be entitled to the moſt ſenſible affection---Teach them that he, whoſe tender mercies are over all his works, will moſt reſpect that virtue which moſt embraceth them---Teach them that he who hath made of one fleſh all nations upon earth, hath ſaid unto all, *Let Brotherly Love continue*.---And finally teach them that as he who loveth him who begat, loveth him who is begotten of him, ſo the affection they bear to their father who is in Heaven, is naturally due to his children upon earth.

On this foundation reſts the moral part of our religion, THE FOUNDATION OF FRATERNAL LOVE. Faith and hope, and righteouſneſs and charity, are but modes and accidents of this great principle---Faith is it's companion; *that your Faith might be in God, unto unfeigned Love of the Brethren*.---Hope is it's companion; *We know that we have paſſed from Death unto Life, becauſe we love the Brethren*.---Righteouſneſs is it's companion; for *Love is the fulfilling of the Law*.---Charity is more than it's companion---it is of it's proper eſſence, and congenial with it.

And ſurely the moral part of religion is it's moſt vital, moſt eſſential part; for we can no otherwiſe ſerve God

God than by ſerving his creatures; Foraſmuch as ye have done it unto one of the leaſt of theſe, ſaith he, ye have done it unto me. To praiſe, to worſhip, to glorify, are unavailable to him, whoſe happineſs, incapable of addition, is the reſult of his own perfections: But to love the works of his hands, to have compaſſion for thoſe on whom he hath compaſſion, and to cheriſh an affection for the objects of his care,---this is our acceptable, our reaſonable ſervice. The human parent is naturally pleaſed with thoſe who are kind to his offspring; the parent of humanity has profeſſed his pleaſure in the ſame.---All beſide is of a more ideal nature; and even devotion itſelf, beyond what implies a clear and ſenſible impreſſion of the divine goodneſs, ſeems to be the exalted exerciſe of ſuperior beings. The "Angel's wing," and the "Seraph's fire," belong not to the limits of mortality; but ſocial love, and charity, and pity, and all the merit of the moral temper, may adorn our religious character here, and exalt us to higher ſtages of exiſtence.

On this view of our ſubject it will occur to us that thoſe inſtitutions which, conſecrated to religion, have withdrawn men from the poſſibility of ſocial virtue, are diſhonourable to reaſon and unacceptable to God.---Thoſe gloomy inſtitutions of voluntary auſterity, which bury the beſt paſſions of the ſoul in conventual languor! Thoſe retreats of holy, yet not humble indolence, where the mind, ſequeſtered from all that naturally ſoftens and humanizes

humanizes it, acquires a torpid indifference or a ſullen averſion; where religion, being entirely mental, frequently degenerates into ſpiritual pride; and where man, even for his ſubſiſtence, becomes a tax upon ſociety, whilſt he is uſeleſs to his fellow-creatures, his Creator, and himſelf.

At the ſame time it is obvious that every aſſociation to conſult the charities and promote the civilities of life, is worthy of our beſt reaſon, of our pureſt religion.---For *pure* religion, and undefiled before God, is to viſit the fatherleſs and the widow in their affliction.

I would not inſult the underſtanding or the virtue of the reſpectable aſſembly before whom I ſtand, by a particular application. I leave my great and general argument with you, and reſt it thus, that THE LOVE OF MANKIND is the fundamental PRINCIPLE OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

THE END.

# LATELY PUBLISHED,

## A NEW EDITION,

I. DR. LANGHORNE's Sermons before the Society of Lincoln's Inn, 2 volumes.

II. His Sermon at the Viſitation of the Biſhop of Bath and Wells, 1776.

*** In the above Sermon, the reader is deſired to correct the following errors of the preſs:

P. 7, l. 16, for *mother*, read *father*; l. 17, for *her*, read *him*.

P. 13, l. 18, before "*that ſpark*, and l. 21, after *temper*," place quotation-commas.